

BIRTH TO SIX: A FOUNDATION FOR ALL THAT COMES LATER

by Judith Orion

Judi Orion, a Montessori expert on the birth-to-six plane of development, delivers a no-nonsense call to arms about the vital importance of the right beginning to set the stage for all that follows. Although we often hear and read about the period from birth to two-and-a-half years, Orion communicates the urgency of responding to the developmental needs of the child clearly and powerfully. From her extensive worldwide experiences, she describes the work of the guide in preparing parents, observation that leads to the optimum transition from the infant community to the Casa, a focus on "the child who is not yet there," and the child's love of work when it matches his interests and skills.

Dr. Maria Montessori did not begin her professional life as an educator, as you are all well aware. She began as a physician and anthropologist. This is the work that laid the foundation for her interest in human development, not education. It is this work in human development that became the underpinning for what became known as her contribution to education. I think it behooves us to remember that she never wanted to be a teacher. She was not interested in creating a new educational approach, but she was deeply interested in supporting optimal human development.

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She gave us a human development framework that became the framework for an educational approach. Over the years, the emphasis on human development seems to have become somewhat forgotten, perhaps because the educational approach that evolved from her work was overriding and easier to implement. I would like for us to return to her human development approach and, for a moment, forget looking at our work as a purely educational approach.

She gave us her framework of the four planes of development. This is a framework we all know but one we often forget. It is the anthropological framework upon which our educational work is based. Let us quickly review some of the general characteristics of the four planes:

The first characteristic I want to remind you of is that the work (the development) occurring in any one plane is the foundation for the work to be done at the subsequent plane. Unfortunately, when thinking of this characteristic, one cannot go back and re-do what didn't get done or was badly done in a previous plane. Information can always be learned, but the time, energy and effort needed to learn later takes away from the work that should be occurring during the current plane. We sometimes set up a situation for two opposing forces or needs: the needs of the current plane versus the remediation necessary from a previous plane.

The next characteristic is that the child in each plane has specific physiological and psychological characteristics. Therefore, specific needs and specific environments are needed to satisfy those needs. These specific environments and the materials for each is what has informed us over the years in how to create the environments for the educational models we have created.

The developmental differences and needs of the children have also informed Montessori teacher training. We know that someone trained at the 6–12 level is not equipped to teach in a 3–6 environment, just as someone educated to understand the 3–6 year old, won't have the information to deal with an infant or a toddler.

Another general characteristic is that Planes 1 and 3 and Planes 2 and 4 are parallel planes; the parallel planes have similar character-

istics. The first and third are planes of great physical, psychological, cognitive, emotional, and social transformations. These two planes are each followed by more stable planes in which the work of the previous plane is consolidated.

Many of us had our Montessori beginnings focused on the second subplane of the first plane: the years from 2.5–6+. As you know, this is the subplane in which Montessori first began her work and discovered so many characteristics that were not considered the norm in children of the age. From her work with children from 2.5–6+ years of age, the work expanded in both directions until today where we have work, environments, and teacher training for all four planes.

It is this first plane of development that we are focusing on today. I want to focus my comments on the work that has been done worldwide for first plane children and hopefully draw your attention to aspects of this plane that perhaps, are under-utilized, under-acknowledged. I will also ask us to revisit Dr. Montessori's beginnings with the 2.5–6+ years.

So, let's begin with the first subplane of the first plane, which would be the years from conception to age 2.5 or 3.

Who is this child?

One day, in great emotion, I took my heart in my two hands as though to encourage it to rise to the heights of faith and I stood respectfully before the children, saying to myself, "Who are you then?" (*The Secret of Childhood* 122)

This child, ideally conceived from love, is truly a miracle, a miracle that we most often underestimate. She arrives at birth with a store of sensorial experiences, though all those experiences were somewhat muted by the amniotic fluid. She arrives with prenatal points of reference; she arrives having familiarity with her mother's, perhaps her father's, voice. And she arrives seeking one main thing: a connection with at least one person, ideally her birth mother.

If supported and given time, she will work her way to her mother's breast, lick, nuzzle, attach, suckle. She is, after all, a

mammal and still has mammalian behaviors if we allow them to manifest. If you doubt this, just Google “breast crawl” and watch various video clips of newborns reaching the mother’s breast, attaching and beginning to suckle. It is truly marvelous to observe this mammalian behavior.

An infant arrives endowed with “gifts” that aid in the work of taking on the characteristics of her kind. She has gifts to help her learn language, to learn the mannerisms of her group, to learn the food preferences, to learn the movement patterns, and to learn the biases and preferences of her group. We speak of these “gifts” as human tendencies: urges and propensities that push every newborn baby to acquire human characteristics. We know that babies are born as a-cultural beings, but by the time they complete the first plane of development, by the age of 6, they are completely cultural beings. They speak the language or languages of the family and greater culture, eating the foods, moving in a particular way, worshipping in the manner of their kind. This is now a child of a particular culture at a particular time and place: a miracle!

So knowing this, how can we support this development? The child after birth travels through a second embryological period, a period that Montessori referred to as one of the *spiritual or psychic embryo*:

It follows that the newborn child has to do a piece of formative work which corresponds in the psychological sphere to the one just done by the embryo in the physical sphere. Before him there is a period of life different from that which he led in the womb; yet still unlike that of the man he is to become. This post-natal work is a constructive activity which is carried on in what may be called the “formative period,” and it makes the baby into a kind of “Spiritual Embryo.” (*The Absorbent Mind* chapter VII)

Now let’s have a small review of physical embryology. This is a short period in prenatal development, beginning at the third week and going to the end of the third month. It is during this period that the physical body is formed: all the tissues, the organs, the systems. This is the most critical period in terms of negative environmental influences. This is the period when a child can be left with congenital malformations, which are malformations created in the beginnings of life. This is a relatively short period in human development but it

is a period that lays a foundation. Once the physical body is created, it is not yet capable of true human functioning. A period of initial maturation is required in utero in order for life to continue after birth. But even then there is a second period of physical maturation in order for this new human to move like a human (bipedal), speak like a human, and eat like a human. As mentioned, if there is a negative environmental influence during the embryological period, the child will be left with a malformation. These malformations are permanent and some will affect the quality of life. Some of these can be remediated but will always leave a scar. The physical body will never be as perfect as it could have been.

In psychological development, a similar development and maturation is needed. Montessori refers to the spiritual or psychic embryo meaning that there is a period after birth during which time the newborn must take on the human characteristics of its group. This period—from birth to 2 or 3 years (different ages appear in different sources)—lays the foundation in all aspects, of subsequent development. This is a timeframe that needs increased understanding and additional support in order to optimize the potential, which lays the foundation for the 2.5–6-year old. For example, if a child under the age of 2.5/3 does not have environmental possibilities to continue to challenge the hand development, this child arrives into the Casa with a very underdeveloped pincer grip, necessitating remediation (which is usually not intellectually challenging) but which must be done before a pencil can be held and controlled and before metal insets can be introduced. Our children should be able to perfect their pincer grip when the hand is ready (primitive pincer at about 9 months and mature pincer by 12–14 months).

A parent's views may not always agree with ours, but that is unimportant. What develops is a sense of trust, a trust that the parent will not be judged for their parenting skills, a trust that opens the way to receive information that may sound different. This is when parents are very receptive to information about human development.

Knowledge of development during the first 2.5 years is critical to supporting the child's optimal development. There are many

sources of information about development for this period, so much so that parents may be left unable to choose what seems right. This is where we in Montessori have much untapped knowledge and this is knowledge that needs to be shared with parents, even before the birth of the child. The Montessori work with children under three began in Rome in 1947; it is not something new. Though, over the past twenty-five or so years, more and more of what Dr. Montessori and Adele Costa Gnocchi observed in very young children is now being validated by the neurosciences.

Much has been written about the birthing setting. In the 1946 Lectures, Dr. Montessori was clear that birth, unless there was some problem, needs to take place at home and not be in a hospital where sick people go! She emphasized the importance of immediate contact with the mother, where the primary attachment could take place. The importance of this primary and supported attachment has been significantly validated by the work in attachment theory. We know that if the child does not make an attachment to at least one human being, all subsequent development will be compromised. Ideally the first attachment is to the birth mother, and in some cases this is not possible. It must be to at least one consistent human being, for



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how else is the child going to learn about being human if he does not have a consistent human being as a model.

Birth is followed by a very significant, though short, period of symbiotic relationship between the mother and newborn, supported by the father. In many traditional cultures, the first 30–40 days after birth is a very special, protected period during which time the mother and newborn are given much support. This is the period when the initial maternal-infant bonding must take place. This is when the mother learns each of the newborn's various cries and responds immediately with what is being requested, such as milk, a new position, a dry diaper, a cuddle, etc. When the newborn's cries are answered immediately, the child gradually comes to trust that this new place is a pretty good place and is a place where needs will be met. The psychoanalyst, Erik Erikson, refers to this as the establishment of basic trust, a trust that one's needs will always be met by the environment, the world. This is one of the two main psychological accomplishments for the newborn during the symbiotic period.

The second psychological foundation laid during this period is one that Dr. Silvana Montanaro refers to as *the creation of a preferential relationship*. Preferential relationship refers to the model of intimate human relationship that the newborn absorbs as the norm (good old absorbent mind working here again). If you think about the most intimate relationship a newborn can have, it is nursing. This happens many times during a 24-hour period, especially during this symbiotic period, the first 6–8 weeks following birth. If the newborn is absorbing a model for intimacy, then we would want the model to be a positive one. A relationship in which both partners are physically and psychologically present; this means no texting, no talking on the phone, no watching TV, being psychologically present. When both partners are present, this becomes the expectation for intimacy in this child's future. When this is not the case, the child still absorbs the pattern of intimacy based upon her experiences, though it may not be so positive.

When one is in the middle of this period, it feels like a lifetime. Upon reflection it was a short period, a period of adjustment and of falling in love. But what is papa doing while mom and baby are

falling in love? He is falling in love also, just in a different way. He's there supporting mom and baby as they establish breastfeeding. He's changing nappies and walking the floor and crooning to the baby. As the dad does not have breastfeeding to create his own special relationship with his son or daughter, he finds a ritualistic activity that is just his and his baby's. Perhaps it is singing, perhaps it is taking a walk, perhaps it is playing a guitar, perhaps it is sharing a bath. The activity is not important. The physical and psychological presence is what matters, just as that presence is what is so important to the mother and baby.

And now, the difficulty can arise: micro-managing by mom. Moms generally spend more time with their babies than dads do, but moms have to step back and allow dad to find his own way. Allow and trust that dad will find the way that works for the two of them.

At the beginning of symbiosis we have a woman, a man, and a newborn. At the end of symbiosis we have a mother, a father, and a child: a family. Just as the physical birth requires some assistant—a midwife, a doula, an OB—the birth of a family requires some assistance. That assistance can be given by an assistant-to-infancy trained person, by a post-partum doula, or by a school community. This is a time in which a school community can be extremely helpful for a new family. Meal assistance can be organized, someone can go in and do laundry, clean occasionally, shop, take older siblings to school, and there are many more ways to help. With this kind of support, a mom and dad can give themselves to understanding their newest family member. They also can be physically and psychologically available to help older sibs come to accept their new sibling. A supportive school community can organize itself to offer this kind of support, helping to midwife the birth of the new family. Once the symbiotic period is complete, the family is ready for a more regular routine. At this point, a school community can be of great support.

A parent-infant gathering is a community composed of adult and infant pairs. The group meets weekly for several hours, and, ideally, for an additional period for discussions without the baby so parents can focus on the information being discussed. This becomes a place where a parent, a nanny, a grandparent (whoever



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cares for the child) can ask questions that seem too unimportant to ask a pediatrician. This group shares the wisdom of its collective members. This is where we can offer information about infant-child development from a Montessori perspective. A parent's views may not always agree with ours, but that is unimportant. What develops is a sense of trust, a trust that the parent will not be judged for their parenting skills, a trust that opens the way to receive information that may sound different. This is when parents are very receptive to information about human development.

Some schools choose to offer *care* for infants, a Nido. This is a small, homelike group of infants from 2 to 3 months until walking well. Babies *do not* need a Nido, parents need a Nido. To offer this type of care requires a funding source other than the tuition charged. The group size is small, nine or ten infants. The adult-to-child ratio is expensive: one adult for no more than three infants. If tuition covered all the expenses of running a Nido, parents could as easily afford nanny care. To consider offering a Nido, schools need deep pedagogical discussions, careful selection of staff (not everyone can easily work with infants), and additional funding. Parents also

need to understand that what they would ideally like is one-to-one care for their infant when, in fact, what they are buying is group care. From guilt or grieving, a parent often projects their worries and fears onto a Nido staff and will try to micro-manage. Nido staff can be supportive by not informing parents of major milestones (rolling over, standing, first steps) and let the parents experience them at home.

Once a child is walking well, an *infant community* is the next environment. The child can enter an infant community from a Nido, or directly from home as the first community environment the child experiences. Parents, toddlers, and staff need a preparation for a transition into an infant community. The toddler can be in this environment for a half-day or all-day, depending on the needs of the parents and the possibilities for staffing.

The work in an infant community is very special and very different from a Casa. This is not a preparatory class for the primary! There are no 3–6 sensorial materials in this environment. There are many activities in practical life and language and some materials for fine-motor skills, self-expression, gross movement, and for relating to the natural environment. But there are no 3–6 materials; if a child is ready for 3–6 materials, they are ready for the Casa.

This is where the challenge comes in: Prior to the beginning of the AMI 0–3 training, AMI primary diplomas stated an age range of 2.5–6+. Once the 0–3 training began, the AMI diplomas adopted a more standardized age grouping: 0–3, 3–6, 6–12. That policy was changed perhaps two years ago, and primary diplomas now read, once again, 2.5–6+. Often, when their diploma reads 3–6, primary teachers do not think or believe that they should have children younger than 3 in their primary class. Many of us in this room began with 2.5-year-olds, or sometimes children even younger, in a primary class. The ages in our albums were different. In some states regulations make this challenging, not impossible, just challenging.

Back to the infant community, when children are held in an infant community for too long, deviations set in very quickly. If the staff misjudges readiness, and the primary teacher comes to observe an already deviated child, he or she might think that this child is not

ready for primary. This child was probably ready a month ago but is now deviated. Staying in an infant community is not going to correct the deviations, only challenging work will. Cognitively challenging, self-chosen, interesting work is needed, not the work of the infant community any longer. They are ready for bigger and better things.

Parents and staff need preparation for this transition, parents especially. They need to observe the primary class their child will transition into. They need an opportunity to ask questions and perhaps talk with a parent whose child transitioned from an infant community to a primary recently. A primary class is so different from an infant community. More children, more materials, larger age range, no constant, daily feedback from staff about what the child did. Sometimes an infant community staff person is not ready to let go of the child. Sometimes it is an administrative challenge. Sometimes it is the primary teacher who is resistant. It is ideal to arrange a conference with the parents, the infant community staff, and the primary teachers to discuss the changes about to take place, which is the fact that their child is really ready for greater challenges. When looking at the possible challenges we face in transitioning a child, foremost in our mind should be the question, "For whom does this school function, the adults or the child?" Transitions should be based on human development *not* state regulation or school policies. Ultimately, the one who loses out, as adults sort themselves, is the child who is ready for bigger cognitive challenges. Think of a child who has been baking bread, washing linens, ironing, arranging flowers, cutting fruit, spreading cheese, and then moves into a primary class only to be shown how to pour beans or rice from one jug to another or string beads.

For some primary teachers, one of the challenges is toileting. We as adults in a child's life, have created deviations here through the use of paper diapers and pull-ups. Then, we ask the children to put their cognitive development on hold until they get their toileting act together. This is another area for parenting information. Parents need to understand all the challenges that using paper products presents to a child, rather than only seeing the focus on their own convenience! This is also an area where staff need some information and trust. Many children in any kind of transition will revert to previous stages of development, including not being toileting

independent. This is a passing phase. They will see the other children in the primary class using the toilet and before long will be doing so also. Never refer to wet pants as having “had an accident.” An accident is the term we use when one is hurt, there may be blood. Wet pants are simply that, wet pants, not an accident.

The child comes into a primary class ready and open for the first and second touch boards and then quickly sandpaper letters and the sandpaper globe. They are very tactile explorers at the age between 2.5 and 3.5. They love the touch boards and sandpaper letters then, but not when they are 4! In this way, the moveable alphabet is prepared for by the time the child is 3.5–4 and not 4.5–5!

They have had experiences with many vocabulary materials, but they now need something more interesting than fruits, veggies, farm animals, typical animals seen in a zoo, and articles of clothing. They are ready for a wider world of fish, amphibians, reptiles, birds, mammals, arthropods, echinoderms, insects, etc. They need an expansion of artists and musicians (though they have already experienced some). Remember their absorbent minds; these minds can take in prodigious amounts of vocabulary. Also, there is now a gradual shift from the unconsciously functioning absorbent mind to the consciously functioning absorbent mind. Children are becoming aware of what they are learning.

Margaret Stephenson, whom some of you may remember and hopefully many of you have heard her name, once said about children under 3.5 in a primary class, “ $\frac{3}{4}$ of their day should be spent doing some kind of language.” (If you have never heard of Margaret Stephenson, check out her “Little Green Books” published by AMI/USA.)

If a classroom assistant can read and sing with children, do you not think they can also do three-period lessons? I know we are led to believe that only the trained teacher can give these lessons. Perhaps some topics, yes. However, if you have children under 3.5 years, needing lots of vocabulary lessons every day, will you have time to do all of them? If not, who will? I am a firm believer that every classroom assistant should be trained in how to give an exciting three-period lesson and anytime they are not otherwise engaged,

gather a small group of three children and give a language lesson. I believe experienced teachers can simultaneously give two or three different three-period lessons.

We so often underestimate the power of the absorbent mind, and parents need to understand this power so they can also take advantage of it. Help them to understand how easy it is to give specific names of things (rose) rather than general names (flower). For students in training and for parents, I often use the story of Dr. Silvana Montanaro's four children. (Dr. Montanaro's four children each took their first steps with one stiff leg, mirroring her movement pattern.)

We must remember (again from Dr. Montessori) that the only cure for deviations is the child's own work. This work reconnects the child with reality, work that can be repeated and leads to concentration, work that is self-chosen from interest....

The young child in a primary classroom will have three years in which to master most, if not all, of the 3–6 materials, really preparing them for the work of elementary. If a child enters when they should (by 3.5), and is given challenging work, lots of challenging work, they are prodigious workers. Montessori called them, “conscious workers” as compared to the “unconscious creator” of the first sub-plane. After three years of a variety of work and planning on the part of the teacher to keep them progressing with interesting work choices, they approach their elementary years with a very strong foundation. They are ready for the discoveries made through the use of their imagination and power of reasoning.

I think some of us have forgotten Montessori's statement about one characteristic of a Montessori teacher who is to keep in mind and to always see “the child who is not yet there.” It has become easy to focus on the deviations of a child, to focus on the challenges we are faced with today, which often means children who spend too much time in front of a screen, children who have had little-to-no sensorial experiences with the real world. We focus on what is not working rather than what is working. We must remember (again from Montessori) that the only cure for deviations is the child's

own work. This work reconnects the child with reality, work that can be repeated and leads to concentration, work that is self-chosen from interest (not just curiosity). We must always keep in mind the transformative power of work. Be wary of “time-out chairs”; they are not always the best solution and should never be used with toddlers.

I often see children’s abilities under-estimated and they are given work that does not stretch them and does not appeal to their interests (I’m not referring to screen interests here). We must expect the highest from them and we must appeal to that part of them that perhaps is sleeping and has yet to be awakened. We must have high expectations for their behavior; we must give them security by having very clear and consistent limits. The one over-riding rule for children is “You may do nothing to hurt yourself, others, or the environment.” This pretty much covers anything and is only one rule that the children have to remember. We must get them to do productive work. They do not need praise, they do not need coercion, they need work!

I have mentioned several ways of supporting parents during a child’s progression through the first plane. I hope some of these suggestions can be taken up by your school community. Many of these suggestions need someone who is trained at the 0–3 level, not just the 3–6 level. Most often a school hires someone with a 0–3 diploma just to work in an infant community. I suggest using a 0–3 trained person to give childbirth education classes, conduct parent-infant groups, parenting information sessions, and all other supports that parents may need. Many parents are seeking this type of support today because this is the kind of support that gives them concrete, approachable suggestions for their home. Some 0–3 diploma-holders become home consultants who go into homes and give advice. Perhaps one free home consultation could be provided with acceptance into a school. Parents should never think though that their acceptance is contingent upon a positive outcome from a home visit. Home visits are lovely ways to begin building trusting relationships but should not be part of the application process.

CONCLUSION

We need to become proactive, beginning within our school, to create parent support for a child's first three years. This approach would include childbirth and parenting preparation classes, parent-infant classes, an infant community, and perhaps a Nido. In every one of these offerings, we must always remember that the child is actively trying to construct himself. To do that, he needs our emotional (attitudinal) support, our physical support, and our environmental support. This active construction takes the form of work.

We also need to recognize families that need additional support. The majority of parents do the best they can do with the information they have at the moment. However, many families need, perhaps only for a short time, a bit of support to get through a difficult time. We must also bear in mind the cultural differences and socio-economic differences in families.

Here we must again heed Montessori's stress on the importance of work as the normalizing factor, but this work must be challenging and not just busy work. Below are some examples and approaches to challenging, normalizing work.

- *Work to acquire movement acquisitions.* This is work we do not have to motivate in the child. The desire to move comes from within the infant; the stimulus to move comes from the environment. This movement, of course, has two forms: the development of equilibrium (walking in a human pattern) and the use of the hand as a tool. Many of our children have too little experience to develop this tool to its full potential. Their movement is often hindered by too many regulations, too many toys that do not challenge, or no close supervision so that potentially hazardous materials cannot be used. Neurologically, a primitive pincer grip is available to a nine-month-old. To take this primitive pincer into a mature one that can easily hold a pencil requires use and challenge. Many children arrive into a Casa with very underdeveloped hand skills.

- *Work to acquire human language.* This work requires at least one human with whom to communicate because it must be a reciprocal arrangement. There should be little to no pacifier use, no screens, and no constant background music.
- *Exploration to the physical reality of the world.* This exploration is initially a sensorial one through which the child gains knowledge. This sets the foundation for the imagination and for the reasoning mind to fully function in the second plane. We often limit a child's legitimate exploration by our over-protection, our over-concern about safety, laws that limit what we can do, acquiescing to parent pressure, forgetting the potential of each and every child, and by forgetting about the power of work, especially when dealing with children with deviations. Time-outs are for adults, not children, and especially not for young children. This is *not* to say that children do not need limits; they do. However, consistently using "time-out" as a limit is not always the best approach. A child needs to be connected to work that is of interest, that will challenge, that is self-chosen, and will be repeated until it leads to concentration.

When a child enters a Casa after having been in an infant community for six months or longer, they are ready for bigger challenges. They are ready for the first touch board, then the sand paper letters, and lots of vocabulary enrichment cards (all classes of vertebrates, some invertebrate classes, artists, musicians, schools of painting, geographic land/water forms, parts of plants, flowers, leaves, roots, types of trees, flowers, herbs, veggies, fruits, specialized clothing, parts of a bicycle). This child is ripe for spoken language enrichment and is ready for more every day! The child who enters the Casa after an infant community is ready for the solid cylinders, the pink tower, the first color box, and some practical life that is challenging. When she enters a Casa and is offered spooning and pouring, she will not be challenged and will show little interest in the practical life activities. If such simple activities is all she is offered, she will find other outlets for her need to work, to explore, to communicate.

Our other theoretical guide throughout the first plane of development is the power of the sensitive periods. As you know, these are short (usually), intensive periods when the absorbent mind of the child is focused on a particular aspect of the environment. It is this intrinsic motivation that allows the child to immerse herself in some type of activity that responds to the need of the sensitive period. How do we know when a child is in the grips of a sensitive period? We do have some general knowledge of approximate ages when certain sensitive periods occur. However, how do we individualize that knowledge so that it is applicable to every child and how do we capture the moment? *Observation!*

It is only through our ongoing observation that we see those sometimes subtle signs: the child who continually gravitates toward a particular type of activity; a child who is always touching things and feeling their textures; a child who suddenly picks up a pencil and tries to write, even if they have not yet mastered the formation of all the letters; a child is very interested in the grace and courtesy lessons; a child who is continuously moving; the child who is always putting things to right. There are signs, but often we are too busy to notice them. When we do, when we can align our knowledge with our observations and give the right presentation at the right time, the child will work tirelessly, day after day, at mastering some skill.

Some of the sensitive periods are very long: language develops from seven months in utero (when the fetus can hear the mother's voice) to the end of the first plane. During this long sensitive period, the child should develop a very rich spoken language or languages. On this foundation, a child develops an interest in writing and later in reading.

Most of us are probably products of missed sensitive periods. We can function quite normally but can we remember the effort we had to use to master certain things? A child who can work with the push, the drive of the sensitive period learns things easily, effortlessly. It is the missed sensitive periods that causes many Montessori schools to not enroll children after 3.5 years of age. The work generated by sensitive periods is the work that is so impressive in a first-plane child and is at a level and perseverance of work that most adults would not request of a child.

Our responsibility then is to focus some of our scheduled observation on the evidences of sensitive periods. When we can utilize the intrinsic motivation of a sensitive period, our work is pretty simple: All we have to do is to give a clear presentation of the materials needed.

It is this power that helps generate the prodigious work I have spoken about. This work is not generated by us. We simply show children how to use materials; we don't have to motivate the child to repeat because they do so spontaneously. But we do have to capture the moment.

When we can commit to offering parental support during the first plane via the ways mentioned and offer a fully implemented infant community, we can then offer a fully implemented Casa by recognizing and utilizing the power of the sensitive periods and the absorbent mind. We are setting the stage for a child who can be fully able to move into the elementary environment, not just with strong academic readiness and interest but by being a child of his time, place, and culture. This is a self-assured, secure, happy, contented child who embraces life. This is a child who is concerned about all life forms, a child who is concerned about her planet, a child who is courteous, who is in the third level of obedience. This child has a strong foundation in the facts of reality, in the real world and knows the sensorial characteristics of this real world. He begins to understand the differences between fact and fantasy. He is interested more and more in working with a small group rather than working alone, which is one of the reasons the later primary language and math materials lend themselves to small group work. These children who have spent three years in a Casa understand all the rules about how the day goes and is aware of who is doing what kind of work. They willingly give lessons to the younger children and they lovingly take care of their space. This is the child who has reached that point that Maria Montessori called *normalization*, and she referred to this as "the most important single result of our whole work" (*The Absorbent Mind* 186).

A child's body begins to change as they enter the second plane: They lose baby teeth, gain inches in height, become very "tough," and are no longer so susceptible to childhood illnesses. They form

clubs, they enter the age of “rudeness,” they relish in telling corny jokes. Outward order is no longer a need they have because they have internalized that physical order into a mental order. They often look a bit untidy after being awake for one hour. Parents often mistakenly take this change in characteristics as being a part of Montessori education because they are not realizing that this is a normal part of human development. From a strong foundation of the first plane, these children are moving into a completely different plane of development, with different physical and psychological characteristics, different needs, and the need for a very different approach to their education. We can support that child by offering fully implemented elementary classes. Supporting the child can also come from supporting the parents through interesting information given in a variety of ways about the changing characteristics and needs of these children so parents will know how Montessori’s ideas, when fully implemented, supports those changes.

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